



Future Born



97 11 7

Chapter 1 by Typre

There was blood on my face and I wiped it away grimacing. This was not how I had planned for the day to go.

I sighed glaring down at the body at my feet. Hopefully, the body would still be salvageable enough for me to get my pay. Propping the corpse against the wall I headed towards the mouth of the alley, snatching up my knife on the way.

Normally, I wouldn't have gone to such desperate straits but my little brother was sick and my older sister was running herself ragged trying to get the money we need. I wasn't old enough to get work but I was old enough to be out of school so I had resorted to thievery and murder to get food on the table.

Someone crashed into me and I scowled hard, glowering at them. They shrank back a bit before remembering that it was somewhat ridiculous to be scared of an eleven year old girl. Brushing past, they never noticed that I had picked their pocket and was currently riffling through the various uwsars and stolones.

Chapter 2 by rickrubb

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'Ghaaa!' a voice inside my head said as I walked down sandy street, but the tenth near the end of the street. Just as I was about to turn around and head back home, I spotted the perfect target.

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A tall, slender woman wearing a gold and red gown walking hurriedly down the street in front of me, expensive looking sand fox pelt draped about her shoulders. Against the glaring desert sun she held a crimson red parasol adorned with a white rose, the flowery crest of some up and coming royal house I had offhandedly heard about. The extravagance of her dress combined with the disgust radiating from her face made her look ridiculously out of place in the outer rings of the city. *The perfect target*, I thought to myself with a smirk. I quickened my pace and within a minute I was only steps behind her. A few seconds after that, and I was peeling down a side alley, the velvety fabric the woman's wallet tucked tightly between my fingers.

The alley was mostly empty, save for an overflowing dumpster which I decided would make a good bit of cover. I sat down behind the rusting metal and took out the wallet, grinning giddily at the prospect of the riches it held within. *It could be gold! Or maybe even jewels!* I undid the clasps with a slight chuckle, *jackpot!*

I stared in disbelief at the barren insides, and my stomach dropped. I ran my finger along the edges, hoping for some hapless coin stuck within the lining, but no, nothing. I dropped the wallet and stared up at the sky, wondering if now would be an okay time to cry. The bounty had taken days to track down, and then another few working on the elaborate distraction to get him away from his bodyguards. Not to mention the way I botched the actual kill...

Anyway, whatever I ended up getting paid for the kill probably wasn't going to be enough, even supplementing my sister's work. I kept telling her she should use her powers and get noticed by a royal family, but she just kept insisting that revealing them would make us targets. She did have a point.

Wait, I thought. I frantically grabbed wallet and stared at it, a smile creeping over my face. *Maybe?*

I peeked around the corner of the dumpster making sure I was alone. Then I sat up straight, placed the wallet carefully in my open palms, and closed my eyes. I moved my thumbs over the soft material, thinking about its previous owner, how she must have put some money in it at

some point. *Come on. Focus!*

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And my mind slipped into a daze. I could feel the heat of the sun on my skin, the roughness of the streets, or feel the ground beneath me. The world was a blur, a distant memory. I was lost, untethered, almost.

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I opened my eyes to the sight of the woman in gold. She was blurry as if submerged in a rippling pond, but it was definitely her. I floated in the air above her, in a strange room filled with expensive trinkets and fineries. I felt like a ghost picking someone to haunt. The woman sat at a small table filling the wallet with... I gasped. Where as most people used various paper currencies, the woman was placing little squares into the velvet folds, each shining with shades of ruby and turquoise. Through the blur my eyes couldn't make out exactly what they were, but I knew.

Shards!

The woman pocketed the wallet and left the room. I floated there in the empty room unsure of what to do. Then I remembered something my sister had said. I imagined a clock, and the room disappeared, replaced by a massive grandfather clock floating in a sea of black nothingness. I reached out an invisible hand and turned the hour hand forwards an hour.

The clock dissolved into the city's Grand Bazaar, and I saw the gold dress walking away from me. This time my surroundings were much more clear. I floated there, again unsure of what to do. I tried walking towards her, and quickly realized that swimming was how to get around in this ghost like form. I swam after the woman until she stopped at shabby little corner stand selling fresh sand fox pelts, where she started conversing with the merchant. The woman walked around the stall, slowly admiring the quality of the pelts until she was standing right beside the merchant. I swam around as well and positioned myself just behind them, seeing their mouths move but unable to hear the words they spoke. I watched their lips for a few moments, looking at how slight the actual movements were. They almost looked like they were whispering.

The Shards! I had barely seen the woman's hand move, but when I looked down it was the merchant who was holding them, hands clasped behind his back. Strangely the woman moved back around to the front of the stall where she picked up a light hazel pelt and showed it to the merchant, who smiled and said something in return. The woman reached into her pocket and withdrew the wallet, opening it and handing the man a handful of paper bills. Then she left.

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This time I imagined everything was frozen, and when I opened my eyes the woman was standing beside the merchant, hand at her side with the paper thin slices of rare gemstone hidden between her fingers. I reached out my hand, which now looked like a translucent snake, and plucked the Shards from her hand. I then imagined myself changing the clock, and the scene shifted to the woman saying goodbye, moving to close the now empty wallet. I slipped the Shards into the pocket and imagined motion.

The woman closed the wallet, pocketed it, and walked away. I closed my eyes and thought about waking up.

The next thing I knew I was sitting by the dumpster again, bombarded by the smell of rot and the sleepy clamor of the afternoon streets. I looked down at the bloody velvet laying in my hands, and gingerly undid the clasps.

I think I may have screamed, maybe jumped for joy, probably cried a little bit, but in the end I was laughing like crazy, cradling the little red, blue and green squares like they were the most valuable things I had ever seen.

They were, after all.

Chapter 3 by rickjomb



The guard at the end of the corridor sat twiddling his thumbs, and tried his best not to look at the deathly dark void of the unlit tunnel before him. He sat up straight, dusted off his jacket, and pulled out his pocket watch... then slumped back into his chair after realizing he still had well over half an hour left on guard duty.

He picked up his sword and inspected the blade for nicks. Instead, its manicured sheen reflected the light of the candle beside him blinding him for a few seconds, and he sighed; *perfect, as usual*. Being stationed in the capital was nice and all, what with the brothels, theaters, and the Grand Bazar, but the youth found it quite boring. Yes his barracks had a gorgeous nearly 360 degree view of the Sand Sea, and yes the pay was better than good. But it

was boring as all hell. He was 19 years old for sand's sake, and a well trained swordsman on top of it! He should be far beyond the capital, fighting against the barbarians!

Two more weeks, he told

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He rocked back in his chair for a moment longer before suddenly realizing he had never learned to whistle, whereupon he intensely tried to twist his lips in a way he imagined someone who often whistled would.

He broke into a smug little smile as he heard a melodic tune squirm its way out from midst his sputtering. The guard leaned over and focused his concentration on his lips, and again he heard a sweet melodic little melody hidden between the sputters.

The chair flew back against the wall, its rickety legs snapping off in a cracking clatter. The guard stood, back straightened from a chilling bolt of fear, eyes and ears perked towards the shadowy corridor before him. The melodic tune was quiet, frailly drifting from out of the darkness. It's fluttering notes came as a sweet melodic dance of joy and happiness, and for a moment the youth's shoulders relaxed.

Then the pitch began to drop, the sweetness replaced with a dull and sad tune, one which soon plummeted to a frighteningly crawl, eventually reaching a low set of creeping, sickly notes.

The sword clattered against the stones and bits of splintered wood, settling in a heap of ruined chair beside the door swinging idly open; the sound of boots clapping up flights of stairs quickly fading away from the dungeons' depths.

Beyond the dwindling candlelight entrance, labyrinthian corridors filled with rows of empty cells reverberated the eerie melody. As the tune echoed through curtains of iron bars thick with rust, it decayed into a harsh mess of muffled, seething shrieks.

At the end of this maze of rock and metal lay a solitary room, its bars long since replaced with thick slabs of solid iron, only a thin slot through which nothing but food and noise passed.

Inside a haggard man sat curled and rocking, a mix of spittle and blood drooled from his writhing grimace as he gnawed away the tissues on his fingers. He pulled back his head

grunting and hissing in a crazed, animalistic whimper.

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The man's rapid breathing was a low, vibrating hum, his body convulsing. He shakily sat cross legged, and straightened his back, inhaling the sickly sweet

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stench of copper rising from the pool beneath him. He wriggled his toes against the slick stone, and with his left hand gingerly caressed the exposed bones of his right.

The mans breathing slowed further, his teeth gritting against the pain as he grasped his exposed bone.

Then, with a wash of relief, his mind slipped into oblivion.

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